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Leroy Garrett, Editor

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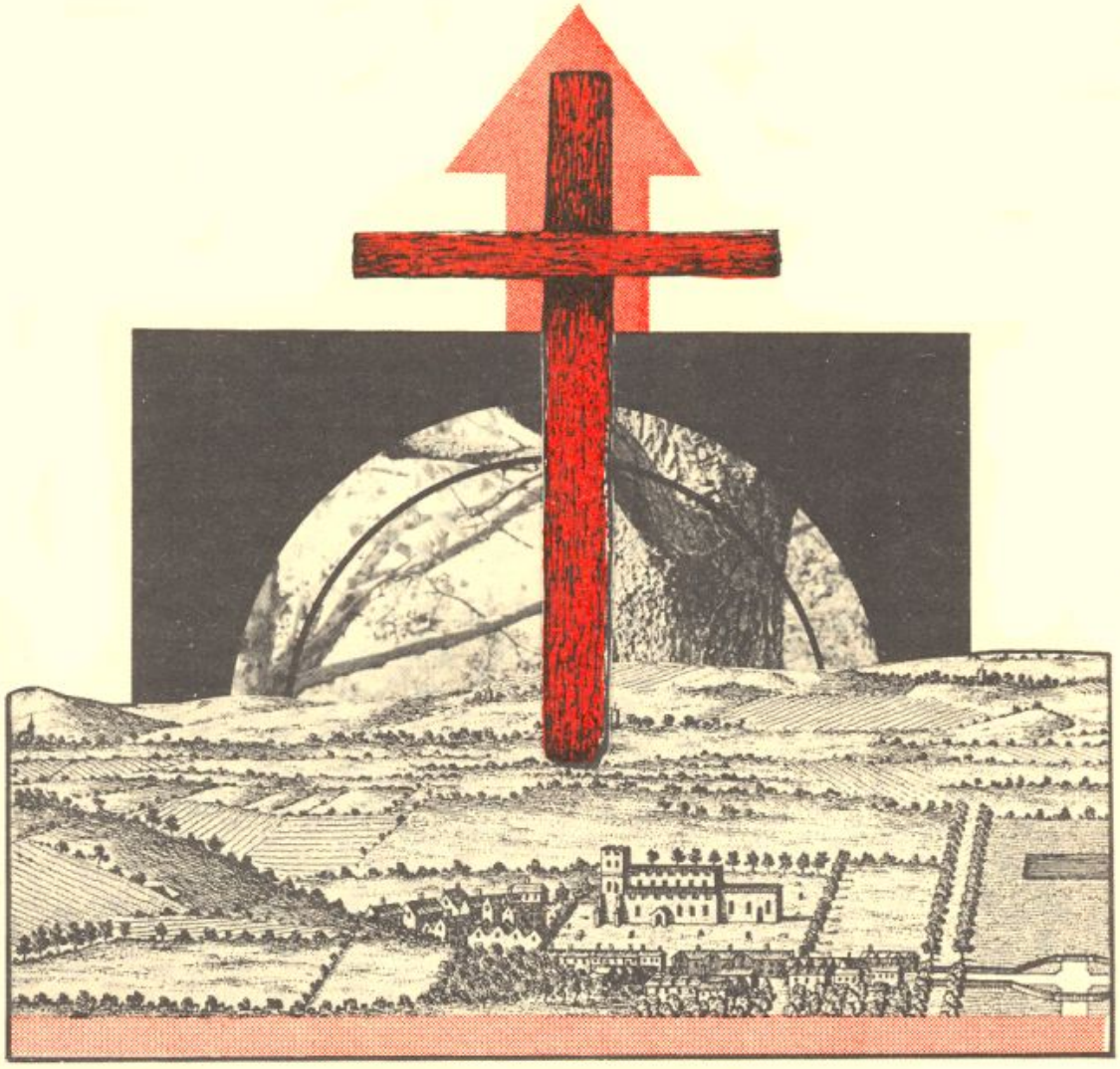

We are no slave woman's children; our mother is the free woman. Christ set us free, to be free men. Stand firm, then, and refuse to be tied to the yoke of slavery again. – *Galatians 4:31, 5:1*

Volume 15, No. 9 **Leroy Garrett, Editor** **November 1973**

The Church of Christ: Yesterday and Today . . .

VISITING AMONG FREE CHURCHES OF CHRIST

Recent excursions have taken me to a number of "free" Churches of Christ, and I think it will interest our readers to know about them. Such congregations are on the increase to such a degree that I have been asked to supply a listing, so that these liberated folk could contact each other. But such an undertaking would be risky, not only because a "free" church is difficult to define, but also because it might encourage sectarian attitudes, which is the very thing we want to avoid.

A church that is free will not be sectarian, for it will not draw the line of fellowship over matters of private interpretation and it will receive as brothers all those who are in Jesus, Nor will it proselytize, presuming itself to be the only loyal church; but it will evangelize by bringing the lost to Jesus. To proselytize is to conform men to our own sectarian mould; to evangelize is to conform men to the likeness of Jesus.

That is as far as I need go in defining a free church, except that I might add that it is a congregation that is "at liberty to grow according to its own uniqueness, to think, to innovate, to be creative, and to practice the priesthood of all believers. Groups that are moving in this direction would do well, no doubt, to communicate with one another. but a way can be found with out any of us drawing up still one more list of churches. I have no interest in telling people where to worship while traveling! Besides, free congregations of Christ surely reach far beyond our own ranks. There are liberated people in Jesus who never heard of Alexander Campbell and who know nothing of the Restoration Movement, and probably as much so in Russia or Korea as in Texas or Tennessee.

But *our* free *(freer* might be a better term since freedom is a continuing experience) churches are something else. I never cease to be amazed at what I find, and it is just as well that I don't have to take blame (or credit!) for it. These churches, born amidst the drama of revolution, are testimonials that this is an age of change. But they are also warnings as to what to expect in the near future if our leadership does not show more responsibility in dealing with our discouraged and restive brethren, whose number is increasing as rapidly as their patience is decreasing. Elderships often panic when threatened by change, the inevitableness of which they are slow to see, and as a result they do some of the most immature and asinine things imaginable. In some cases they actually drive people away out of fear of them, not knowing how to cope with the problem otherwise. In other instances they resort to such political chicanery and highhandedness that they force people to leave out of disgust, folk who are the staying kind and who would

have otherwise hung in for awhile longer, and these are often the most stable, the most affluent, the most intelligent, and the most spiritual.

Some congregations become free after being "orthodox" for years. These are the churches that are dubbed *liberal* or whatever once they become different. Then there are new churches that are started in a freer context than most of the members are accustomed to, and these too are soon labeled for what the *status quo* assumes them to be. But the free church that has the toughest road of all is the one that leaves the mother church, usually in protest, and starts another work in a different part of the city. This is strictly a no-no, and every weapon in the arsenal of ecclesiasticism is brought to bear against such groups. Over the past few years I have shared with my readers some of my experiences with a number of such churches in several different states, some large and some small, some new and some several years old, and representing various groups within the Restoration Movement. But the following descriptions are of new groups, formed within recent months, and are yet unknown to most of our folk.

I took my 14-year old Ben with me on one such visit, all the way to Mobeetie, Texas, out west where the wind seems to blow all the time. Ouida accompanied us as far as Abilene, where we visited with an ACC professor and spent the weekend with a congregation that might well be called *free*, in terms of this report at least, a designation that I could hardly apply to any other group in Abilene. It has become a "hangout" for some of ACC's less conforming students, including a few with lots of hair, and for years it has been a haven for ACC preachers who like to say what they really think.

The ACC professor who made the appointment for me and who hosted us has since been fired, but I am assured that there is no connection between the two events. But that the prof has become charismatic, albeit a quiet and unassuming one, did have something to do with it. And that he would dare to do things like address the Full Gospel Men's Fellowship is also related. The college administration was not present to hear what he said to his fellow charismatics, but they rapped his knuckles nonetheless, assuring him that such things were embarrassing to Abilene Christian College. As irony would have it, the good brother was actually critical of some of the claims made about the Spirit in his remarks and expressed alarm over sectarian tendencies of charismatics. But no matter, if you *belong* to ACC you are less than free in what you can say and do and where you can go. Some years back one dean, now retired, made it clear to one professor who was attending the Christian Church that he was to cease such questionable activity forthwith.

Well, at least I am defining what I mean by *free*. The prof who was fired by the college could have remained as minister to this congregation, who appreciated him greatly, charismatic or not, but of course he had to move from the city in order to find employment. It might be just as well if H. E. W. officials in Washington do not read this report, for an investigation of this man's release might show that it was because of

religious discrimination, and this has a way of annoying such officials to the point that they start quoting the law and withholding federal grants. A college has the legal right to be that sectarian, but it is not suppose to be that way while it laces its budget with federal money. One of our colleges has had to cough up lots of money for violating the terms of a loan for a building, which they were not to use for religious purposes, but did.

But this Abilene church is not one of those I set out to write about, though it is an illustrious example along the way. What I liked most was its complete openness, a willingness to listen and consider, and the kids from the college got a bang out of what I said about unity and fellowship. Such a group has a way of maturing in the Lord much beyond what is normal. They just take it easy and let Jesus put it altogether. And it did not alarm them one bit to have the likes of Leroy Garrett around. They have to be free!

Mobeetie is something else. It is so small that we barely found it, and we had to stop and ask in order to make sure. So expansive is that part of Texas that I finally relented to Ben's pleas to drive our frisky Firebird, an exciting venture for a lad learning to drive, but a risky one since he would be behind the wheel on a public highway without a license. His assurances that "Daddy, there's not a car in sight" convinced me, and sure enough he breezed through a large hunk of the Texas plains without a hitch. But a car did finally appear —you guessed it —a highway patrolman checking for driver's licenses up ahead. I told Ben to pull over. Something told me that I should be driving. With straight face and guilty conscience (I was ready to be hauled off to jail!) I handed the handsome officer my license. He looked us over with a smile and waved us on. I think he knew and understood. Too bad brethren aren't always that gracious!

Lester Hathaway, now well into his 60's and longtime debater for the non-class Churches of Christ was our host. Standing in his front yard we looked over his land - as far as we could see in three directions, and that's along way out there. He lived there a poor man 40 years ago. All these years he's preached all over the country and has debated everybody and his dog, while farming his way to wealth. Ben got a kick out of his descriptions of his debates, especially when he'd narrate both sides, supplying a few gymnastics along the way. I spent my time being thankful that I never had to come under his polemic wrath. When I would question him about some of the arguments he made in those wooly days, he would laugh at himself in good humor. And in one serious moment amidst all the fun he opined that it may be just as well that those days have passed while at the same time relishing the memories and the triumphs' One thing for sure, Lester was cut from a rough mould, west Texas tough, but he is as lovable and childlike as Ben. And what a change in his life has been wrought!

His congregation has been known all these years as the straitest of the sects, the scene of lots of warfare. But recently it has undergone such a transformation that it now hosts visiting choirs and ministers of other churches —*denominational* preachers I mean. Not

only has their building been revamped to compliment the affluence of west Texas (It no longer looks like an “anti” church), but the congregation has an attitude of acceptance that I was hardly prepared for. And they now have instrumental music! It is the only church among us that I know about that is still a Church of Christ that has a piano. I reported earlier on the Emerson St. Christian Church (a Church of Christ), which is the way the sign reads, in Bloomington, Illinois that now has the instrument, but this was a merger of the two groups. But in Mobeetie we have an old-line, non-class Church of Christ with a piano, with no Christian Church influence involved whatever. It is an instrumental non-instrument Church of Christ! And Lester Hathaway is ready to debate anybody that questions their freedom to move in this direction.

More important, however, than an organ or no organ is the spiritual concern of the people. They love one another, and they have turned on to the community around them, sensitive to their responsibility of witnessing to a lost world. They have no awareness of compromising any truth, and if anything they regret all the time they lost in the throes of sectarian strife. If I were Lester, I would have sought all these changes for the better without introducing instrumental music, for it would have violated my conscience. But I am not Lester, and I did not take it up with him. I like the way he speaks of Jesus with such real concern,. and I was willing to settle for that. He has a way of saying, “I once had a head full of scripture, but a heart empty of Jesus.” If you drop in to see Lester, he will not only talk about the Lord, but will probably show you his farm and tell you of the changes that two generations have brought. It once took 10 or 12 hands to do what one can now do with all his sophisticated equipment. Ben was amazed to see a machine that would cut the hay, bail and wire it, and then stack it orderly in the wagon. It would then load it in a barn without ever being touched by hand. He also has a sprinkling system that will water several acres at a time, rotating in a wide circle like some ghastly beast, spraying whatever amount of water desired, all by the press of the button. This makes it possible to raise four crops a year on the land.

Our visit to Mobeetie was cut short by my getting an infection. I soon had such a fever that Lester took me to nearby Wheeler, where a physician said I would have to be hospitalized at once. I asked him if he didn’t think I could get back to Denton to my own doctor and hospital. He said I could do this if I would leave at once, which was a mistake. I drove faster than I should have, but it was a lost cause, the fever being faster than my car. I was soon unable to drive and barely conscious, but there was no hospital along the way. I was too ill to have found one anyhow. Only in those hours did I discover just how big and bloodless Texas really is. In desperation I had to turn the car over to Ben, no longer able even to help him watch the road. I would have been pleased to have come upon a patrolman in my predicament.

The hospital was on the right side of Denton, and Ben drove in like a real trooper, not having to drive in the city. I had to be carried in, and they kept me there for five days. We were thankful that Ben got the driving experience that he did earlier on the trip, but it was still quite a chore for him. He told his Mother that he was crying and praying all the way. I do not recall being so ill, so I was ready for one of Ouida's gentle lectures about taking better care of myself. I stayed home for awhile. Since Ben is the hero of this part of my narrative, I am pleased to announce that he recently obeyed his Lord by being immersed. He talks about being a medical missionary, which sounds just great to Ouida and me.

There are free churches in both Caruthersville, Mo. and Dyersburg, Tn., which are separated by only a few miles and the Mississippi river. But they did not even know about each other until I was able to visit with them both. I have briefly referred to the Dyersburg church in these columns before, identifying it as the place where Pat Boone's sister and her husband had been withdrawn from. Others were also excluded for sympathizing with them. This became the nucleus of the new congregation, led in part by Dr. Douglas Haymes, a highly respected physician in the city.

We had an evening's session in a community building with a fair turnout of preachers in the area, not all of whom were in a cooperative mood. I gave an interpretation of Romans 14 and fielded questions. What might have otherwise been a stormy session proved to be reasonably calm and constructive, partly because they could see, I think, that I had a loving concern for all and that I had not come as some kind of "answer man" having all the solutions. I did some listening along the way and the tensions seemed to subside. Dr. Haymes and his wife Shirley are salt of the earth, eager to be a blessing both to the church and to the world. It is only a sick church that would reject such people, and it grieves me to see such lovely people bruised and battered by ecclesiastical madness.

The new group is now separated because there was little else to do. They are happy in the Lord, loving and encouraging one another in their assembly where people are free to say what they will and at liberty to be themselves in Jesus. Especially impressive is their forbearing attitude toward those that rejected them. As one listens to the story of what happened he is impressed with the futility of a System that causes people to panic in the face of the slightest threat. If a business man should show such unimaginative and immoderate leadership, he would be doomed to bankruptcy. Our leaders, panic stricken in the face of change, actually become criminal in both their attitude and conduct toward their own brothers and sisters in Christ. The same men would surely have a higher standard of morality among their business associates and neighbors. If not, they would do well to stay out of the penitentiary. And it is amazing how such men manage to run off some of the most exemplary people in the community. It is ghastly.

I drove my rented car onto a ferry for the trip across the Mississippi, a business operated, by the way, by one of the brothers that I was soon to meet in the new congregation in Caruthersville. He had his men watching for me so that I would not be charged the usual fee, which is high enough to keep people on their respective sides of the river. Watching the old tug boat make its turns reminded me of the old days, Mark Twain and Alex Campbell and folk like that. Old Man River does something to one's spirit. Soon a bridge will span the river in that area and Eric Taylor's ferries will be a thing of the past, just about the last ferries to go from the old river. Too bad.

In Caruthersville I met a group of seventy or so people that must be the most liberated that I have ever been with. By liberation I mean love, joy, peace, enthusiasm, intelligence, affluence, youth, old age, beauty, humor, and all the rest. You name it and they've got it, bless them. And the story of their separation is barely believable. Among their number is part of the presbytery and diaconate of the old church and some of the most active leadership, including folk that have themselves taught and immersed people, building up the very congregation that finally rejected them. I have urged them to put their story in writing and make it a part of the archives of the congregation, for it will surely blow the mind of some future historian who tries to unravel what happened to us in the 70's.

Believe it or not, these folk were such stayers and sticklers that the old congregation actually dissolved itself and then reinstituted itself on the basis of a creed, called by them "A Reaffirmation of Faith," in order to get rid of them. With the stage well set beforehand, the professional leadership of the congregation announced one Sunday morning that the congregation was dissolved and that in reconstituting it no one would be considered a member who did not sign the Affirmation, which they knew the freer ones would not sign. The creed not only called for "baptism for the remission of sins," which they supposed the emerging group did not believe, but also the sinfulness of instrumental music and "we cannot worship with denominational and sectarian groups and be acceptable to God." It also named "social drinking, dancing, cursing, defrauding, striving and lying."

Those who would reaffirm their faith on such basis, which included the affirmation that Jesus is the Son of God, were to come forward and sign their names. The number who did so was 138, leaving 70 or so sitting in the auditorium that would not, one being an elder who had guided the congregation for many years. This brother stood before God's flock and tried to dissuade them from such sectarian madness, all to no avail. He pointed out that they were making a party creed the basis of membership in the Lord's church. The 70 souls who would not sign the creed found themselves looking at one another in amazement at what had happened, and then they walked out of a spanking new building that they themselves were largely responsible for building.

They soon came into possession of an inner-city building of the Pentecostals, who, like everybody else, had moved to the fringe. It is an old frame job, but adequate enough. Denver Fike, the Elder referred to and longtime respected mortician, told me that the old building they now have means more to him than the elegant one that they had left out on the highway ever did.

I explained to him that the reason was that he felt like a free man in the old but a slave in the new. It is interesting how we come to value things, isn't it? A man can walk out of a luxurious building in the suburbs into an old one in the poor section of town that even the Pentecostals deserted and be thankful for the change! I am reminded of the Proverb: "Better is a dinner of herbs where love is than a stalled ox with hatred therewith."

This new church is laden with talent. They have moderate interest in bringing a man in to work with them, but they want him to be a servant to the community rather than a resident pastor in the congregation. It is interesting that nearly all of our free congregations are cool toward the minister system, as much for their desire to share together as for the negative conditioning they have received from the system. This crowd is so talented and so eager to be with each other and to share in the Lord that a regular minister would get in their way. I pointed out to them that God makes people free so that they can serve and that freedom is not an end in itself. I rejoice that they have a perspective of service to their community, and it is heartening that they have gone through the ordeal with positive feelings toward their old associates.

Ouida flew with me to New Orleans for a visit with still another liberated group, a fresh one right out of the box. We put our kids on their own, all teenagers now, and left a day early for a sort of working vacation. We were guests of Dr. and Mrs. Clifton Istre. Cliff is in audiology with the Tulane University School of Medicine, while Jeanette is a happy homemaker, riding herd on four lovely children. They took us sailing on Lake Pontchartrain and we spent two mornings walking in the French Quarter, which *is* New Orleans. I learned what Creole means (I think!) and Ouida really went for the Creole seafood gumbo. She also got a bang out of the artists around Jackson Square, the weather being ideal for such a sight. There were any number who could draw or paint your portrait right on the spot in a manner of minutes and do it well. We visited Chalmette where Jackson won the Battle of New Orleans and one evening several couples of the new congregation took us to Commander's Palace, one of the old famous restaurants, where we had a private party in the wine cellar.

We had an evening's gathering at the Istre's where we met 30 or 40 new friends in Jesus. Same new story: spiritual, intelligent, largely professional, affluent, young to not so young, inquisitive and alert, and tired of the system. Now that they were a new church they had lots of questions about what their mission should be and how they should think of themselves. *Should we be a Church of Christ?, Should we keep our old contacts?, What*

changes should be made, if any, in our work and worship? I advised affirmatively on the first two, while the third had a lot of "It depends" in it.

They are calling and advertising themselves as the Central Church of Christ and they are meeting in an ideal situation in a private school for retarded children, the rather substantial rent going to a cause they could well support anyhow. I commended them for associating themselves with God's retarded children, explaining that I was acquainted with the task, having worked with God's retarded people at a little different *level* all these years.

These separation stories are all on the wild side. Here again you have elders and deacons and surely the most responsible element of the old church involved in the walkout, which is tantamount to being thrown out by bruising and battering. It is a case of a large number in a congregation (the old Mother Church in New Orleans) growing more and more disenchanted with the *status quo,* wanting to question, to think, to entertain new ideas and be exposed to more creative speakers, and to grow freely in Jesus. Despite their appeals for change, it was not only the same old pablum and same old system, but they had to suffer abuse and innuendo for being different. When it came time for a new preacher, there was firm hope that the situation could be saved. The old leadership pulled a man out of Dallas with an offer of a fabulous salary (the highest I've ever heard of in the Church of Christ,) and one who is not known for his openness.

The emerging group urged that a peacemaker be sought rather than a bruiser. One elder produced a letter from Dallas, sent in confidence, that said preacher had Napoleonic qualities. The concerned ones insisted that they needed peace, not Napoleon, and to find someone else. But the man was hired surrepticiously and imposed upon the group, the ones who would bear much of the financial burden. But still they hung in, hoping to make the best of it. An elder who left with the new church is convinced that the Dallas man was brought in for the express purpose of running off the *liberals.* I was assured that the situation in the pulpit became intolerable. One sister told me that she came to dread Sunday like a plague. When such ones began to hold back their contribution, or part of it, the situation really became a pressure cooker.

So, upwards of a third of them simply walked out in the name of sanity, and what is interesting about it is that they did so as one man with no particular leader. No preacher led them, no elder, no one person, and they did not even know Ketcherside or Garrett. They are the "stalwart peasantry" of Luther's day, except not quite so poor, and this of course upsets the clergy to no end. That the ordinary guy and gal out there in the pew can rise up and do something about our sordid sectarian mess and clerical domination is an awful threat to ecclesiasticism. Mark it, our people will take only so much. I told the new church that they have done what Church of Christ innocents are not suppose to do. They are suppose to listen to their preacher and be good boys and girls. To walk out and start a new church —only laymen —is unthinkable, and so they will bring all the powers at their

command upon you to destroy you. Such a thing as this cannot be allowed to succeed. Others might start getting ideas. The old church had no one person to blame, no preacher to expose, so they have now withdrawn fellowship from the whole lot. They have put pressure on all other congregations in the area to follow suit, all of which have not gone along.

The stories I have told here will doubtless often be the case in many places in years to come. I would prefer it otherwise, and I will continue to urge people to stay with it and minister from within. But no one method will apply to all situations. Each must find his own way, seeking God's Guidance. When one hears these stories and experiences the freedom that these people have found in their daring, he is not likely to criticize them.

So in those instances where we have to surrender the trench of hanging in and working for change within and retreat to the next trench, it should be the trench of *separation without faction.* People can separate and still love each other. They can separate without "disfellowshipping" one another. In our growing nation we will have more and more congregations anyhow. Some of them can be the kind I've told about, people who leave in love and hopefully with the blessings of those left behind. And once separated they can still maintain some contact with each other and be a united people. Abraham and Lot were still kinfolk even in separation. This is the one thing I stress in my visit with these free churches, that they still love and not allow their freedom to be an occasion for the flesh to do its destructive work.

Well, I've been using military language in talking about trenches. It is indeed a war, man's eternal struggle to be free. The preservers of the *status quo* would do well to listen to what I am saying. Not only are they in a war, but it is one they are going to lose if they do not get with it and learn to make some changes, for the Body's sake rather than the party's sake. —*the Editor*

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AM I MY BROTHER'S BROTHER?

That is the question Cain should have asked in reference to Abel instead of *Am I my brother's keeper?* There is no indication that God expected Cain to serve his brother as keeper, but he was expected to treat him as a brother. It might even be an indignity upon a person for someone to *keep* him, but it is always enhancing to the soul for one to be *brothered* by another.

Cain not only did his brother in by waylaying him, but he has also mislead a lot of preachers by his irrelevant answer to God's question. God had not asked him if he had taken good care of Abel. He was not being called to account for his guardianship over

another. The question was simply *Where is your brother Abel?* He replied that he did not know, which of course was a lie, for he had enticed Abel into the field where he had murdered him. And then he blurts out *Am I my brother's keeper?* as if in defiance. The answer to that was of course *No, you are not your brother's keeper, but you are your brother's brother, so where is he, what have you done?* But a lot of sermonizers have been misled by Cain's *non sequitur* and have assumed that we are to do better than Cain and be faithful keepers of our brothers.

While the term "keeper" occurs hundreds of times in scripture, there is no suggestion in any of the passages that a man is obligated to keep another. It is God who is the great keeper of his people: "The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade on your right hand" (Ps. 121:5); "He who scattered Israel will gather him, and will keep him as a shepherd keeps his flock" (Jer. 31:10). And we would all be pleased for God to say to us what he said to Jacob: "Behold I am with you and will keep you wherever you go" (Gen. 28:15), and to pray as did David: "Keep me as the apple of thine eye; hide me in the shadow of thy wings" (Ps. 17:8). Jude 24 points to the keeper that we all desire: "Now to him who is able to keep you from falling . . ."

In the Bible man is a keeper of sheep, cattle, doors, gates, houses, baggage, wardrobes, forests, and even thresholds, but never of a brother. In another sense he keeps commandments, sabbaths, covenant, the law, judgment, and sound wisdom, but never another man in any sense of obligation. Jailors keep prisoners, masters keep slaves, and kings keep concubines, but brothers do not keep brothers. We are not each other's keeper because we are brothers.

But it is easy for us to assume this role, especially if we are leaders in the church. We tell people what they should read and should not read; we tell them where they can go and not go. And we sometimes dare to dictate who mayor may not be visitors in their homes. We are tempted to serve as Master over other people's consciences, telling them how to think and how to behave. We are often monumental in sticking our noses into other people's business. Some congregations assume guardianship over other congregations, as if it were not enough for them to watch out for their own affairs. It is one thing to provide for the poor and to help the needy, but something quite different to assume the role of keeper. Nowhere does the Bible say anything like "Thou shalt be thy brother's keeper."

We readily acknowledge God as our keeper, for we know he has domination over our lives, a rule and control that we want him to have. But we are not to rule and have dominion over each other. This is why there should be a minimum of government intervention in our personal lives. If the government is allowed to become our patriarch, always keeping us secure with one kind of program or another, then we surrender much of the freedom God gave us as individuals. But many people are quite willing to yield the

management or their own lives into the hands of public program, and it is this same mentality that is willing for clerical powers to monitor their spiritual lives.

We too need to hear the question God asked Cain. *Where is your brother?* In one sense the answer has to be that every man is our brother, and so each person with whom we have to do is to be treated with dignity. And the first rule of social intercourse is for each person to take care of himself, serving as his own keeper. The first commandment should be that we are not to be a burden on anyone else, and each one should take precautions to see that this doesn't occur in his own case, even in instances of prolonged illness and old age. Paul has this responsibility in mind when he says that each man is to bear his own load (Gal. 6:5) and that a man is not to be allowed to eat if he will not work (2 Th. 3:10). The world as well as the church should heed Paul's words: "I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities, and to those who were with me" (Acts 20:33). He didn't want anybody to be his keeper.

There are of course the poor and needy who will always be with us and who should have our help, but always in such a way that their own personal dignity is preserved. We are not to become their keepers, but to help them to be their own keepers. This is the problem with government welfare projects. People become nonbeings in their dependence upon a welfare that stifles their initiative. The government might keep zoos and archives, but not people. Whenever a system keeps people it assumes that those it keeps are pawns to do with as it pleases.

In a special way our brother is every person who is in Christ Jesus, purchased by his blood. This makes us *blood* brothers. While I am not to be such a person's keeper, I am to be his brother, and I should treat him as a brother. This calls for love, kindness, forbearance. It certainly calls for acceptance —a gracious acknowledgment of brotherhood with all who are disciples of Jesus.

We are more like Cain than we may realize. He tricked his brother, leading him into the field under some pretext, planning all along to do him in. Many of our brothers have been deceived in similar ways, whether through secret recordings or public writeups. One can commit fratricide in ways other than club or sword. It is noteworthy that it is while urging upon us love for one another that John urges us not to be like Cain. "And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous" (1 Jn. 3:12). The apostle goes on to assure us that we have passed from death to life *if* we love the brethren. So Cain's problem was that he did not love Abel.

Cain was probably surprised by God's searching question about the whereabouts of his brother. He had to say something, hoping to divert God's attention. So he blurts out, "How should I know where he is. Am I his guardian?" He knew he was not Abel's guardian and he knew God had not asked this of him. So God could have said, "Right. You are not his keeper, so I'll look for him elsewhere." But Cain had killed and God knew it. He was not

calling Cain into account for guardianship but for brotherhood. Cain had no way out. He was doomed because he had broken the law of love and brotherhood. How tragic!

But are we all that different from Cain? The Lord may ask us about our brothers that we ignore and even maltreat. “But they are our brothers in error!,” we protest irrelevantly, not unlike Cain. God could ask us to name some brothers who are *not* in error! “They are our *liberal* brothers” or “Yes, but they are anti’s” are *non sequiturs* that get close to Cain. Still God asks *Where* is *your brother?* We are like Cain when we reply that our brothers are only those in our own little party, and we are like him when we are willing to commit fratricide, with words and actions if not a stone, so as to preserve our party image. We are like him because we hate instead of love.

God isn’t asking us to be our brother’s keeper, not even in terms of keeping him for the party. But he is asking us to be our brother’s brother, and this transcends all party lines. When we find the real Jesus we will find our real brothers, and in him we will accept everyone of them. —*the Editor*

The Hartford Unity Forum, Dec. 27-28, features nine men and women discussing baptism, pastor system, work of women, inerrancy of scripture, cultural influences in church order.. Carl Ketcherside, presiding. For info: Berdell McCann, 127 Donna Dr., Hartford, II. 62048, 618-254-6454.

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ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!

My protests in this article are not likely to stop the source of my consternation, but I must speak my mind nonetheless. Like Jeremiah I am weary of holding it in. The latest issue of *Firm Foundation* had still another one, and I suppose I have read a score or more in recent years.

I am referring to those announcements by Marvin Bryant that still another Christian Church preacher has changed or been converted and has “become a part of the churches of Christ,” small *c* of course. Occasionally the convert is a Baptist minister or a preacher from some other denomination, but more often than not he is a brother from the Christian Church.

This is a concerted effort on the part of Marvin Bryant and those who support him. Marvin spends most or all his efforts in this direction —"converting denominational preachers." The usual approach is to invite the clergy of a given area, along with their wives, to some such place as the Holiday Inn for dinner. By inviting a large number there is usually a respectable response, providing Marvin with a good audience of preachers. He presents his plea for unity, based upon the ancient order, which is subject to varying interpretations. One Christian Church minister, who attended such a dinner meeting in Dallas, complained to me that he felt Marvin's whole pitch was to the effect that the problem of division is solved by everybody going over to the Church of Christ. He thought he had been invited to a unity meeting!

Marvin has at least some success. He comes in contact with preachers who for one reason or another are attracted to his plea. They leave their churches and join ours, and Marvin seeks to make this a reasonably easy transition for them. The writeups indicate that the converted preacher hopes to move from the pulpit where he has been to one of ours with little or no lost motion. This latest announcement of the Christian Church minister has him resigning his pulpit with a two month's notice, after which he expects to be employed by a Church of Christ somewhere.

This appears to be no problem even in our most orthodox circles. One Sunday these men are "digressives" or "false teachers" who would not even be called on to lead a prayer in our assemblies. The next Sunday they are in our pulpits in "full fellowship" (one of our odd expressions that leaves me wondering what *partial* fellowship would be) with no questions asked. Marvin is not always clear in his announcements as to the measure of the subject's repentance, whether he has confessed the error of his way or whether he supposes he'll fair better among Churches of Christ.

It looks a bit hypocritical to me. Not only are the dinner meetings on the beguiling side, suggesting that the Church of Christ has a conciliatory attitude toward denominational ministers that it certainly does not have, but this whole matter of moving a Baptist or a Christian Church preacher over to us without missing a lick indicates that we don't really believe what we have been saying about them. If they are really sectarians as we charge, does this change all that much by their coming over to us? This would mean that all sectarian preachers would cease being sectarian preachers if they crossed over to the Church of Christ. If we are all that right and they all that wrong, it would seem that the transition would have to be more compelling. Should they not have to go to purgatory for awhile so that this deep-seated sectarianism might be burned out of them before they take a place in our pulpits? If not to purgatory, then surely to Lipscomb or Abilene for a period of cleansing and indoctrination. Holy ground somewhere, surely. If not, we ought to take back what we have been saying. Marvin makes it too easy for men who have been so corrupt in doctrine. It leaves one to wonder just what motivations Marvin uses in attracting

these men. It is clear enough that with the announcement of their change there is a call for their immediate employment. They are changing jobs, at least that.

Since preaching is now a profession among us and we have a clergy like everybody else, it follows that our pulpits would be subject to this kind of exchange, under ordinary conditions that is. Disciples sometimes take over Congregational pulpits and Methodists sometimes hire Presbyterians. But not so among the Roman Catholics, for if you serve at one of their altars you must become one of their priests. And this is where we come in. Like the Romanists, we presume to be *the* church and only our ministers are truly gospel preachers. So we don't hire Disciples, Baptists or Pentecostals, unless of course they undergo a conversion at one of Marvin's dinner parties.

It would be interesting to take a poll of these new breed of Church of Christ ministers as to whether they believe they were not Christians until they joined us and were not gospel preachers until they crossed over to our side. I do have some light on such questions. I met one of these new preachers at an Abilene meeting who had come to us from the Christian Church. "But were you not my brother when you were with the Christian Church?," I asked him. He assured me he was. "And were you not a preacher of the gospel then?" He nodded that he was, but then added something like, "But I can't put it just that way with these people, for they don't see it like you do." Marvin's latest writeup tells how this Christian Church brother "has resigned from the Bell Garden Christian Church, Bell Garden, California, to become a part of the churches of Christ."

I love and admire Marvin Bryant (and I love this Christian Church brother without yet having met him), but I must say in all frankness that this is lousy sectarianism. It does not serve the cause of unity to move a man from one sect to another. What does Marvin mean when he says this brother is to become "a part of the churches of Christ"? I thought the "churches of Christ" are the Body of Christ. Is not the California minister already in the Body of Christ by virtue of believing Jesus to be the Christ and by being baptized into him? Already he is *in* Jesus. What else does Marvin want him to be *in*?

What Marvin is really saying is that this brother is now in our party, so let's nail down this sectarian victory by giving him a job. This only aggravates the sordid mess that we are in, our Movement "to unite the Christians in all the sects" (as Campbell put it) divided upteen different ways as it is. A work designed to "convert" preachers within the Movement, moving them from one party to another can only be a work of the flesh. And we have the aplomb to announce it in our press, not unlike an Indian brave adding one more feather to his trove after a scalping raid. Numerous preachers among Churches of Christ have gone to the Christian Church, but as a matter of courtesy these instances are not paraded in their news columns.

Haven't we done enough of this sort of thing? Must our sectarianism be so blatant as this?

The zeal of Marvin Bryant and his dinner meetings with preachers can be more constructively directed. Surely we have some important things to say to the Christian world and Marvin may well be able to say them better than most of us. But the implication does not have to be that a preacher must leave where he is and cast his lot with us in order to be on God's side. If a preacher is impressed with the Restoration ideal, why not encourage him to stay where he is, laboring for the ancient order of things among his own people, for they may be the ones that need him most? If he chooses to work among us, we should of course welcome him, but he doesn't have to be received as a *convert.* If he loves Jesus but has not yet been immersed, we should urge him to perfect his obedience by being baptized. If he has been immersed, we should recognize that he is as much a part of the church of Jesus Christ as any of the rest of us, regardless of what sectarian fence we find him behind. I see little value in simply moving him from one party corral to another, unless indeed the object is to build up one sect at the expense of another. —*the Editor*

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100 MILLION WITHOUT THE BIBLE

Those of us who have a Bible for every room of our houses and in several translations may have difficulty realizing that100 million people in this world are without even a sampling of the scriptures. And that is a conservative figure, for some estimates go as high as nearly 200 million. There are millions more who have but one book of the New Testament or a portion thereof.

This problem is compounded by the fact that many of these people, tucked away in such places as South America, Africa, and India, do not even have an alphabet with which translators can work in giving them the scriptures. No one knows just how many languages there are in the world, with and without alphabets, but estimates run from 4,000 to 5,000. Of these about 1,500 now have the scriptures at least in part.

And this represents a great deal of dedicated work on the part of missionary translators who have lived with tribal groups for years in order to learn languages that have never been in written form. It takes from two to five years to render a single book of the scriptures into one of these languages, and for the entire New Testament a team of scholars must labor for upwards of 15 years. Most of us are vaguely aware that the Wycliffe translators have been busy in this area, but we probably do not know that they are presently the largest missionary organization in the world, supporting hundreds of translators in the remote corners of the earth. And they can properly lay claim to being non-sectarian, for they are not a church and their work is the translation of the Bible.

But the work of giving the Bible to every man in his own tongue continually lags behind, for as one language is conquered for the Lord another one is discovered. There are now upwards of 3,000 languages, some of them spoken by but a handful of people, that do not have God's word even in part. In this era of technology this should stand as one of the greatest challenges of an enlightened and affluent church.

When we gather in a home prayer circle or a Sunday School where as many as eight or ten translations are represented, we should be reminded that there is still much of the world that is not so blessed. There are more than 400 languages in Latin America alone, many of which have never been written down. We may think of Mexico as Spanish speaking, but there are 150 other languages in that country. And who would believe that there are 500 to 700 different tribal tongues in New Guinea alone? And over 300 in Indonesia and other islands of the South Pacific. India has innumerable languages, and so far over 100 have been found that are unwritten. Siberia may be known to us as a cold concentration camp for recalcitrant Russians, but it is also the home of scores of tribes that have no written language, including the word of God.

These facts are disturbing enough, but it really becomes uncomfortable to learn that 96% of the funds of all churches go to support the gospel for the 9% who speak English, while only 4% is used to take the gospel to the other 91% of the world's population. And these masses are not only deprived of the Bible, but they are without education and culture.

I am informed of all this by a new task force that has been formed for the purpose of getting on with the job of translation. It is called F.A.S.T., standing for Final Advance of Scripture Translation, with headquarters right here in Denton, Texas (Address:1740 Westminster Dr. in case you would like to contact them). This group does not itself send out missionaries or do any translating. It is rather a catalyst, motivating more cOI1cern and action among Bible believers and urging more support and cooperative efforts for those already engaged in this work. There is a sense of urgency to their work, and it should encourage all of us to know that there are people so dedicated to a task completely nonsectarian in nature. After all, what is better than handing a person the scriptures in his own vernacular? Some of us seem to think that it is better to send our own brand of missionary along with the Bible to make sure he understands it the way we do!

F.A.S.T. presumes to believe that God loves the jungle tribesman without even an alphabet as much as he loves the affluent American with a stack of Bible translations. They also believe that God expects those who have eternal light to share with those who walk in darkness. This looks like reckless abandon in view of the lackadaisical attitude of the modern church.

But we can rejoice that so much has already been done and continues to be done. The Summer Institute of Linguistics, which has a school in Dallas, has already trained more than 12,000 people in linguistics, preparatory for translating any language on earth. A few of our people of Restoration background have been in this program.

It is unlikely that Churches of Christ are yet ready to make any appreciable contribution to this crying need. We have long been conscious of missions and we now have hundreds of families so engaged, but we have been short of those resources that every missionary must have, save money itself, and so we have had to draw heavily upon other organizations, especially for language preparation. And even here the best that can be expected of us to cooperate in a noncooperative way. Many of our missionaries, however, once in the field experience a kind of "conversion" and discover that the kingdom of God stretches beyond our own group and that some of God's most dedicated servants are found casting out demons in a name other than ours.

But our folk are rapidly moving from sect to denominational status, and with this comes a more realistic view of the Christian world. Once we had no seminaries *per se*, albeit we had our clerical order nonetheless. But now we have at least two, even if called by other names. A missionary society has now begun to emerge, and this out of necessity, for what else can a denomination do that has a far flung missionary program that suffers from a great deal of lost motion and duplication of effort? We will not of course call it a missionary society for the simple reason that we don't like to admit having been wrong, or it may be that people who want to get things done learn that a rose smells just as sweet when you call it by another name.

In any event the ingredients for a missionary society are now at work. John Scott, a professor at Harding Graduate School of Religion and an elder for the White Station Church of Christ in Memphis, wrote recently in *Action* that his church wants to do something about the fact that there is now "no practical methods available for putting churches in touch with potential missionaries." So the White Station church would like to set up a program that will do much of the leg work that missionary societies do, perhaps in cooperation with the Mission Center at Abilene Christian College. Dr. Scott chooses to call this an "information service," and he makes it clear that they do not desire to dictate mission policy or serve as a screening agency. Such functions will of course come in time and in all good faith, for the "information service" will determine what candidates and churches get together. It would not likely, for instance, forward to a sponsoring church a dossier on a person known to be a nonconformist. Besides, missionary agencies, just like clerical training institutions, have to develop over many years.

The Freetown Church of Christ in Dallas has come up with a similar idea and a good name to go with it, the World Mission Information Bank. This will be "a real comprehensive information center from which to draw material" for missionary efforts. Another important step toward a responsible centralized missionary effort, naming it what you will.

We can be hopeful that these developments indicate a growing concern for such problems as scripture translation, and that we will one day be in a position to cooperate with such agencies as the Wycliffe translators, the American Bible Society, and F.A.S.T. This may call for us being truly nonsectarian, a lesson we are slow in learning (for example, in the material sent out by the Freetown Road congregation the statistics are indeed dismal, for in a mythical community of 1,000 people only *one* is a Christian, meaning of course a Church of Christ kind of Christian!), but one that we will eventually learn, more or less, as any maturing religious body learns, more or less.

In the meantime our people can do what we have long shown an uncanny ability to do: generate a great deal of concern and action on an individual basis, leaving the institutional church tagging along behind. Many of us will want to help these agencies that are dedicated to making the scriptures available in every language known to man. What a glorious task! And more of our youth might well choose to work through such organizations.

A young brother from our ranks visited in my home recently who has now finished his work with the Summer Institute of Linguistics. He will soon be taking his new wife to the Philippines where they will together move among tribal people, learning their dialect, and finally reducing one more language to writing in the form of God's word.

And there will be more. And we can hope. And pray. And give. And be concerned. — *the Editor*

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OUR CHANGING WORLD

The non-class Churches of Christ, so long considered impervious to change, are becoming increasingly involved in missions. Scores of their churches and individuals are supporting a substantial effort in Malawi, Africa, where they have a school and hospital as well as churches. Roland Hayes of Houston tells of a recent visit to Malawi where he worked with B. Shelburne and Jack Hutton and their families, permanent missionaries there. He writes of a 3,000 mile trip through the country in visiting with brethren from at

least 225 congregations. He is impressed with the leadership that is emerging among the Africans themselves.

In his book *Psychopaths,* Alan Harrington describes the psychopath as one who is basically without conscience, one with no self-doubts, possessing a driving energy and having no idea of guilt. He is often one who inspires confidence and personal devotion, and sometimes people remain in his spell even when they know better. He believes only in self-gratification, and he feels neither shame nor anxiety in hurting others. He really cares for no one but himself and does not worry whether he is good or bad. The psychopaths life is what Harrington calls "controlled madness, and he concludes that the illness stems from a lack of love in childhood. And psychopaths are increasing at an alarming pace, due in part to the brokenness of the typical modern family. But, interestingly enough, Harrington lays a lot of the blame at the feet of organized religion, for "traditional religious structures have not provided the sense of death and rebirth necessary to bring about change in our lives." Religion at its roots must deal with conscience and consciousness, and it is the disappearance of conscience in our time that serves as the greatest challenge to organized religion.

In his book on *Pentecostals*, WaIter Hollenweger defines a sect as "a person belongs to a sect if he has excluded himself from the fellowship of the saints, that is, if he asserts that in his *own* ecclesiastical organization, in his own theology, and in his own experience of faith, God's will is *infallibly* incarnate." He would almost certainly define a denomination in other terms.

Two leading journals among our "conservative" Churches of Christ are as much at war as the nations of the Middle East. The heart of the problem is the loss of many of their younger and brighter ministers to "liberalism," to the views of Carl Ketcherside in particular. One of the editors of the *Gospel Guardian* is being blamed, and is being taken apart, limb by limb, in the pages of *Truth Magazine*. One young brother who has not yet gone off the deep end is trying to save the *Guardian* editor, so he called on his brother and asked him the crucial question of eternity: *Is instrumental music a sin?* The answer: *No.* All the forces of our far right wing, which appears to be dwindling, are being brought to bear to save the brother from such monumental error. But the erring brother seems to be having trouble in seeing the question as all that important. He even talks about ugly partyism as being worse. Of all things!

A report on a Church of Christ preachers meeting in Ft. Worth reveals that a spirited discussion took place among the 35 or 40 present on the current political situation, including Watergate. While the majority seemed to have been pro-Nixon, it was evident that there is as much diversity in political thinking as in theological among our ministers. But what impressed one observer were the remarks of a missionary back home after a long haul in Africa. He pointed out that where he had been, as well as in many parts of the

world, such a discussion of politics as they were having simply could not take place without those involved being arrested. He suggested that we are much better off than we seem to realize, otherwise wewould not be at liberty to criticize so openly the leaders of our nation.

The *National Catholic Reporter* says that the precipitous decline in church attendance among Roman Catholics has reached “almost catastrophic proportions,” and it sees a connection between such decline and confidence in church leaders. The changes just this past year constitute “the most dramatic collapse of religious devotion in the entire history of Christianity.” In 1972, 61% attended church “weekly or almost weekly,” but this dropped to 48% this year. Last year only 8% attended less than once a year, but this percentage nearly doubled this year. The same report, taken by the General Social Service Survey, reveals that 36% of Protestants attend weekly, down 2% from a year ago. Among Jews only 7% go weekly while 33% hardly ever go at all, not even once a year. Even more distressing, says the report, is that the Roman Catholic decline is not just among the young, but the older as well, Even if the decline now levels off, which is hoped for, “the church will emerge from its present crisis only a shadow of its former self.”

Jesus is the supreme Head of the church, which is His body, filled with Himself, the Author and Giver of everything everywhere. —*Eph. 1:22-23*

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READERS' EXCHANGE

We are very excited about the work here in Santiago. It is really incredible that we haven’t changed very many of our working methods or approaches in the work here, but that the Spirit has worked in a mighty way, convicting men of sin and bringing them to Jesus Christ. We are presently engaged in a campaign with an overflow crowd in the church building to seat more people. More are arriving every week, giving their lives to Jesus in the power of praise. Please ask the brothers there to pray for us as we pray that the Lord increases your ministry. —*Jack Speer, Casilla 14807, Correa 15, Santiago, Chile*

Wearing the name Church of Christ does not make present-day Christians sectarian except when it is used in a sectarian spirit or when it is claimed that this term is the only acceptable designation of the Lord’s people. I have yet to find a single person contending the latter, and most of my brethren use various designations and express regret that the

modern religious situation forces us to use the term Church of Christ uniformly on our meetinghouses. —*Ted Cline, 2930 N. 40th Dr., Phoenix, Ar. 85019*

(Does the religious situation *force* us to do that which we admit to be regrettable? —*Ed.*)

Your publication is indeed illuminating and, no doubt, quite controversial in certain quarters to say the least. Your exposition concerning Campbell's views of sincerity as the basis of being in the good graces of the Deity was new to me and very stimulating. I cannot say that I agree with you as yet; it will require considerable thinking on my part. However I can readily ascertain that were he alive today, John Calvin would have you burned at the stake. —*Sam A. Carter, 115 W. Washington, Altamont, IL 62411*

(And that would be too bad, for in many respects I am an avid Calvinist too! —*Ed.*)

The theology of the Holy Spirit is much more enjoyable to read in the hearts of men than in the pages of a book. —*Mark Smith, 2036 Wood St., Sarasota, Fl. 33577*

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